

WASHINGTON, DC – As Secretary of Health & Human Services Mike Leavitt toured Baltimore today to promote the Medicare prescription drug benefit, U.S. Reps. Steny Hoyer (D, MD-5) and Ben Cardin (D, MD-3) both expressed serious concerns about the Medicare law that takes effect in January 2006, providing seniors with a limited prescription drug benefit.

On the eve of the 40th anniversary of the enactment of Medicare, the Congressmen said that seniors should carefully review the law to determine how to participate in the new program. They stressed that the Medicare prescription drug law that was enacted in 2003 provides huge subsidies to private insurance companies without providing seniors with a guaranteed benefit they can depend on.

Specifically, the Congressmen stressed that the Medicare prescription drug benefit expressly prohibits the government from negotiating lower drug costs for seniors. It also will jeopardize the benefits of millions of retirees who now have drug coverage through private plans.

“The confusing and illogical law that passed in 2003 was not written with the best interest of seniors in mind,” said Rep. Hoyer. “While private interests will make millions, senior citizens and people with disabilities risk losing their prescription drug coverage for a benefit that will provide them with limited coverage.”

Rep. Cardin has introduced the Preserving Medicare for All Act, HR 2487, which would allow the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to use the purchasing power of 40 million Medicare beneficiaries to negotiate lower drug prices. His bill also would provide a guaranteed drug benefit option through Medicare, eliminate excessive payments to private health insurance companies, and end discrimination against employer retiree plans.

“We need to change that law so that 40 million seniors who depend on Medicare get the health care they deserve,” said Rep. Cardin.

While both Congressmen feel that the Medicare law is seriously flawed, they warned seniors to learn about the new changes this law will bring. They urged seniors to call their local Senior Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) offices or go to the [web site](#) .

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